A HISTORY OF ALASKA POPULATION SETTLEMENT

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On the cover: Pioneers on the trail at Chilkoot Pass during the Klondike Gold Rush, 1898. Photo courtesy of Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Winter and Pond.

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Alaska has the longest history of human habitation and settlement of any place in the Americas. Throughout that history, the state's settlement has been shaped primarily by geography, fur, fish, gold, railroads, oil, war, and military strategy.

These factors directly influenced the settlement patterns of Alaska and how population centers waxed and waned over time. Examples are dotted throughout history, from the growth and decline of gold rush boomtowns like Nome and Skagway to the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline bringing in the oil economy with its price-based fluctuations.

Presenting a concise history of Alaska's settlement and its ties to population statistics is not easy — the topic is one that could fill several books, and each era is marked by widely different levels of data availability. Many important historical moments are not evident in population numbers, and some large changes cannot be readily explained. Still, looking at Alaska history through population settlement numbers provides context for much of the state's transformation.

Tracing Alaska's settlement begins with the indigenous peoples before contact with Europeans, through Russian America and the U.S. Purchase, followed by the Gold Rush, World War II, the Cold War, the oil boom and bust, and to the modern day.

The population data come from several sources, primarily U.S. Census records that have been released every 10 years since 1880 for Alaska. Early censuses also included overviews of all counts conducted during the Russian America time period. Several books and academic publications, listed at the end, provided estimates and historical narrative. Finally, all rounded population numbers are approximate.

THE FIRST ALASKANS

Anthropologists have long surmised that the route of human migration from Asia into North America came through Alaska. The Bering Strait, the 53 mile-wide channel that separates the two continents, was an open plain crossable on foot during the Ice Age. The exact nature of this migration has been a controversial scholarly debate, however. Hypotheses have differed on the route taken, whether over land through the Bering Land Bridge or by sea through the Aleutian Islands.

Many Native groups lived semi-nomadic lifestyles, staying in one spot over the winter and traveling great distances to hunt and fish in summer.

Whether there was one large migration or three migrations at different time periods is also a matter of continuing debate and research. One line of thinking focuses on one migration from Asia from which all indigenous peoples of the Americas descend. Another is that several waves of migrations spanned thousands of years, with different groups within Alaska arriving at different times. According to this hypothesis, the ancestors of Athabascans and Tlingit groups arrived in Alaska in an earlier migration than the ancestors of Aleuts and Eskimos. (Vadja)

Surveying the landscape of Alaska before European contact reveals settlement not altogether different from the larger Alaska Native regions of the state today. Many of the past villages were in coastal regions or along the great rivers of the interior of Alaska. Many groups lived semi-nomadic lifestyles, staying in one spot over the winter and traveling great distances to hunt and fish in summer.

UAA anthropology professor Steve Langdon estimates that approximately 80,000 people lived in Alaska by the time of contact with Europeans, which began in the mid-1700s. (See Figure 1.) This population number was not reached again until World War II.

All numbers presented in this section are Langdon's estimated values at the point of contact with Europeans (defined as the first significant direct interaction) that he published in his

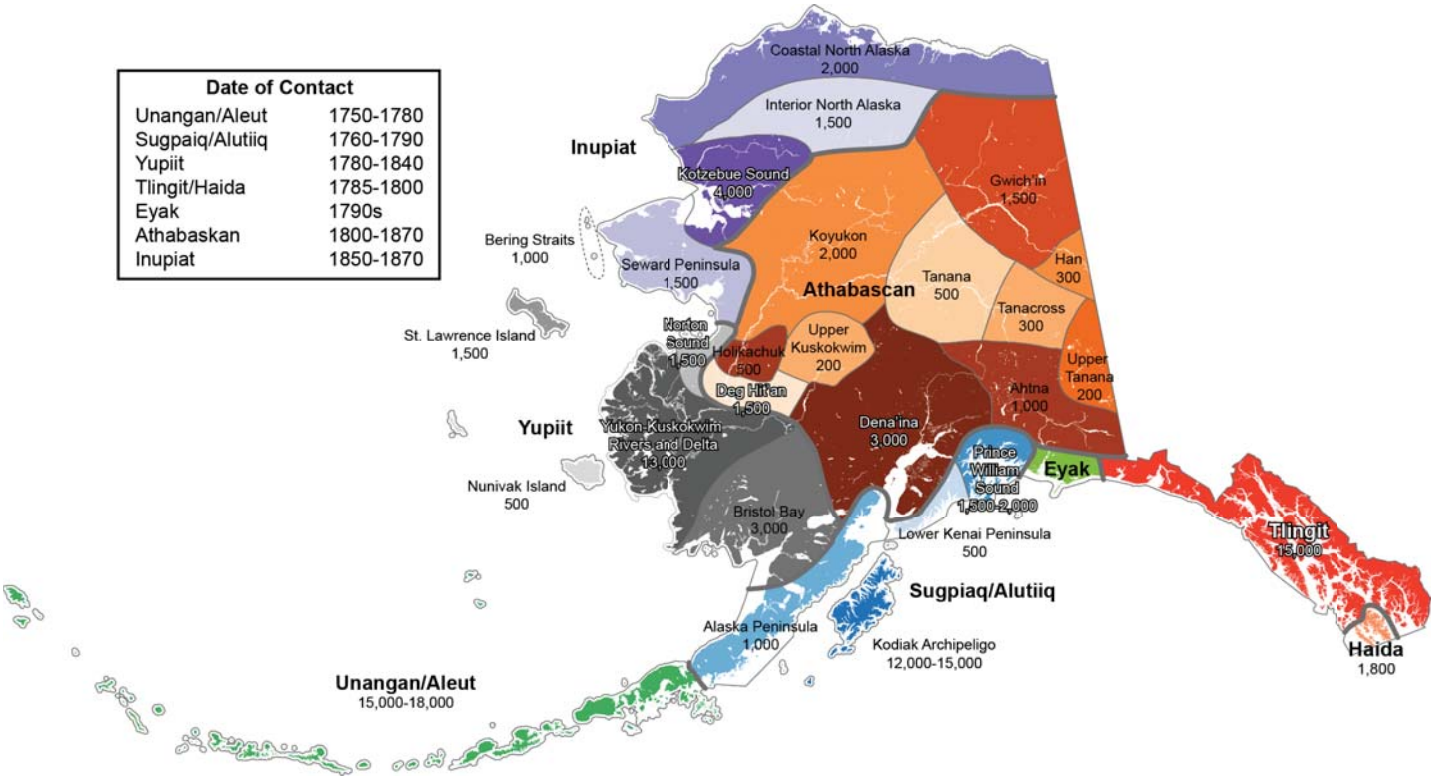

Figure 1: *Map of different Native groups with pre-contact populations (Langdon)*

book *The Native People of Alaska*, numbers that are used by the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage.

Prior to first contact, 15,000 people lived in Southeast, the realm of the Tlingit. The largest congregations resided near the Stikine River close to Wrangell and the Chilkat River near Haines, both close to routes through the mountains. In addition to the Tlingit, around 1,800 Haida lived on the southern half of Prince of Wales Island. Haida were based primarily in modern-day British Columbia, but their range crossed into Alaska.

Around the Gulf of Alaska, the Alutiiq were the dominant group. Around 2,000 Alutiiq lived in the Prince William Sound area and an additional 1,500 resided along the coastal Kenai Peninsula and Alaska Peninsula. However, the center of Alutiiq culture was Kodiak Island, home to between 12,000 and 15,000 people. One of the largest settlement areas was the Karluk River on the western side of Kodiak Island. This salmon-rich river likely had around 1,800 people living nearby, making it among the most populous community or set of communities in Alaska before contact.

Along the Aleutian Islands, west of Port Moller, lived the Unangan people. Commonly referred to by their Russian name "Aleut," they likely numbered between 15,000 and 18,000 for the entire island chain. According to Langdon, Unangan numbers are more difficult to estimate because they were the first to come into contact with Europeans and suffered overwhelming population loss afterward.

North of the Aleutians, the Yupik people occupied the lower regions and deltas of the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers, plus the area around Bristol Bay. This, the most populous Alaska Native area of the state today, had around 19,500 Yupiit at first contact. Of this total, most — 13,500 — lived in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region and on Nunivak Island. Another 3,000 lived around Bristol Bay. The remaining groups were either along Norton Sound (1,500) or on St. Lawrence Island (1,500). A large village near the site of Gambell was likely home to 500-600 residents.

Inupiat along the northern coastal regions were

among the last groups to encounter Europeans. Coastal villages with abundant resources had a more stationary year-round population, while inland Inupiat were nomadic. Large concentrations of people lived in strategic coastal spots such as modern-day Wales, Point Hope, and Barrow. The Kotzebue Sound region had the largest population at 4,000. Nearly 3,500 people lived up along the North Slope, 1,500 on the Seward Peninsula, and 1,000 on the offshore Bering Strait islands.

The inland Athabascan people lived mostly along the rivers of the interior. Totaling 11,000 people, many Athabascan groups moved around to several fishing and hunting camps per year in search of food. The Dena'ina group around Cook Inlet numbered 3,000 people, and the Ahtna group in the Copper River valley numbered 1,000. Most other Athabascans lived along the Yukon/Kuskokwim/Tanana river watersheds. The groups closer to the modern-day boundary with Canada numbered 2,200, while the groups farther downriver numbered 4,800.

RUSSIAN AMERICA

The first foray of Europeans into Alaska was the voyage of Danish explorer Vitus Bering, who reached Alaska in 1741 on behalf of the tsar of Russia. Soon other European nations such as Spain and Great Britain began sending vessels through Alaska's coastal waters, but it was the Russians who claimed the land, hunting for furs and bringing the Russian Orthodox Church with them. (See Figure 2.)

The tsar made this claim official in 1799 with a *ukase* (decree) granting the newly formed Russian-American Company exclusive trading rights and judicial power over the Aleutians and North America above 55 degrees latitude. (Later treaties and commissions would set Alaska's exact boundary.)

On maps of that time period, Russia was in control of the entire landmass that became Alaska, but in truth their direct control varied from heavy-handed to nonexistent. (Borneman) In the Aleutians, the Unangans were subjugated by force and made to hunt sea otters for the Russian fur trade. Other areas, including the Arctic region and inland rivers

Russia was in control of the entire landmass that became Alaska, but in truth their direct control varied from heavy-handed to nonexistent.

areas, saw little if any Russian presence.

While the Russians did not extensively settle Alaska, their coming had a devastating effect on the indigenous population. Disease brought from Europe ravaged the local population. Many epidemics swept through during the Russian America period, including dysentery, influenza, typhoid, whooping cough, and measles. The most deadly epidemic was the smallpox outbreak from 1835 to 1840, which struck hardest in Southeast Alaska and Kodiak. Few medical personnel were stationed in the colony and vaccines were in short supply, worsening the crisis. (Gibson)

The total population loss of Alaska Natives from all causes during the Russian America period is unknown. Estimates are 80 percent of the Aleut and Koniag (Kodiak) populations and 50 percent of the Chugach (Prince William Sound), Tlingit, Haida, and Dena'ina populations. (Langdon)

During the entire period of Russian colonization, there was no attempt at a complete census, for a couple of reasons. First, the Russian footprint remained minimal to nonexistent in several areas of Alaska, including much of the arctic and upriver areas of the Yukon Basin. The other reason is that many of the censuses were conducted by the Russian-Orthodox Church, which only counted believers.

Still, several population counts were made in Russian America by the church and Russian-American Company. Early counts of Kodiak Island in the late 18th century placed the population at 6,000. The first large scale enumeration ordered in 1819 counted 14,019 people in Russian America, 391 of whom were Russian. This count did not include anyone in interior, arctic, or western Alaska north of the Alaska Peninsula. Several smaller estimates of Alaska Natives followed in subsequent years, including an estimate of 5,850 Tlingit in 1835.

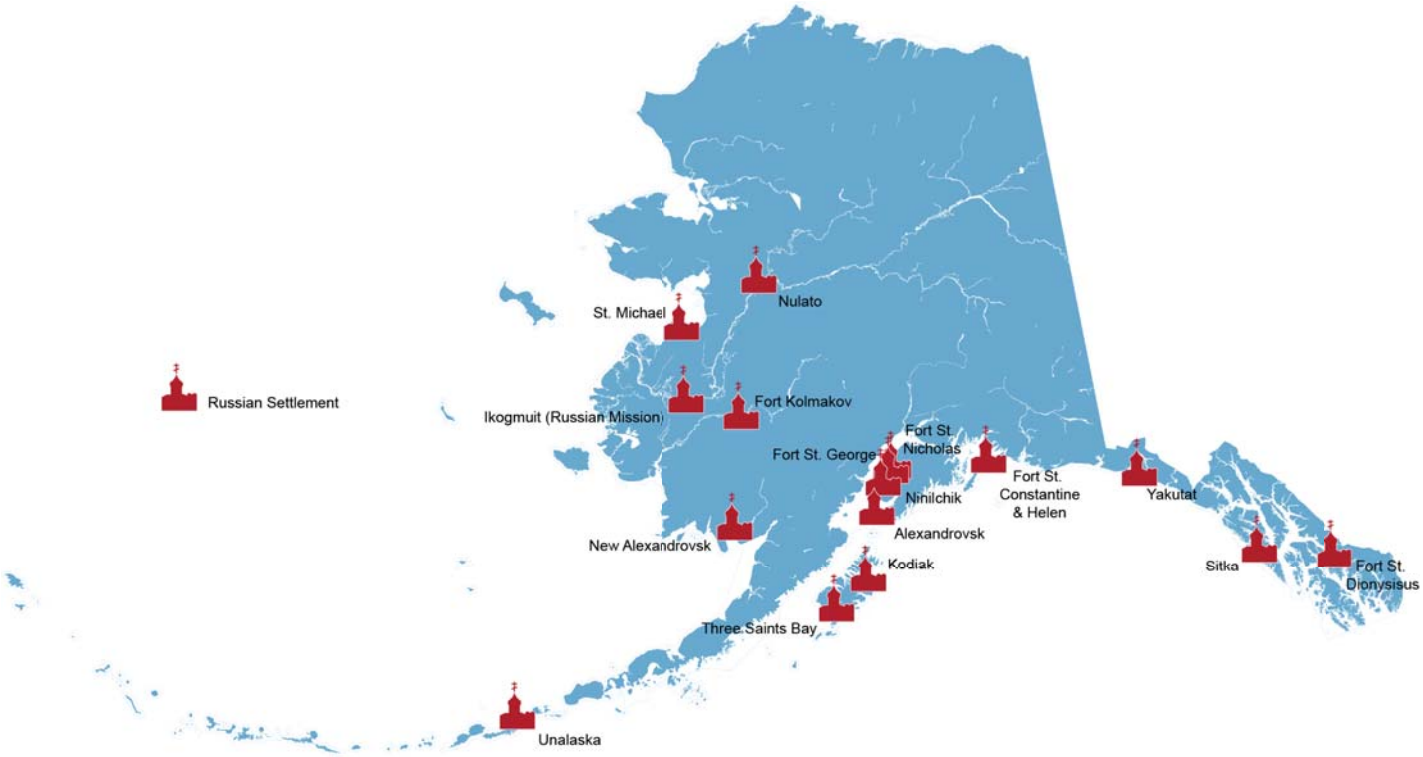

Figure 2: *Map of principal Russian settlements during the Russian America period*

Father Ioann Veniaminov, a Russian Orthodox missionary and scholar who later became Bishop Innocent, produced an estimate of 39,813 people for Russian America in 1839. Noticeably higher than other Russian counts and estimates, Veniaminov surmised that beyond those areas known, 17,000 people had not been contacted yet. He estimated 7,000 people lived along the Kuskokwim River and 5,000 Tlingit lived in Southeast, the most populated areas in Alaska. He put the total number of Russians at 706, with 1,295 "Creoles," or those born of Russian and Native parents.

Before the sale of Alaska, Russian-American Company population numbers compiled from 1830 to 1863 show Alaska's population ranged between 11,022 and 7,224. Though the estimates of Alaska Natives were low, the report also listed the peak Russian population in the territory at 823 in 1839.

During the Russian America period, several settlements formed the center of Russian life in the colony. The earliest Russian settlement was a fur trading post at Unalaska, founded in the 1770s following battles with the Aleuts already living on the island. (Gates) Alexander Baranof, a fur trader and later governor, established two important Russian settlements. In 1791, he moved the Russian settlement on southwest Kodiak Island at Three Saints Bay to the site of modern-day Kodiak. Baranof later founded New Archangel (Sitka) in 1804, following a battle with the local Tlingit. New Archangel became the capital and administrative center of Russian-America as well as the most populous Russian settlement.

By the 1860s, tsarist Russia was seeking a buyer for Alaska. The fur trade that had once made the colony so lucrative had collapsed, and there was no industry to take its place. The United States and Great Britain were best suited to take advantage. Britain, which still controlled Canada, was Russia's great imperial rival in Asia and opponent in the Crimean War, while the United States had enjoyed generally good relations with the tsar. Many Americans with imperial ambitions hoped the purchase of Alaska would be a step toward expanding into British Canada. (Borneman)

The U.S. deal to buy Alaska from Russia for $7.2

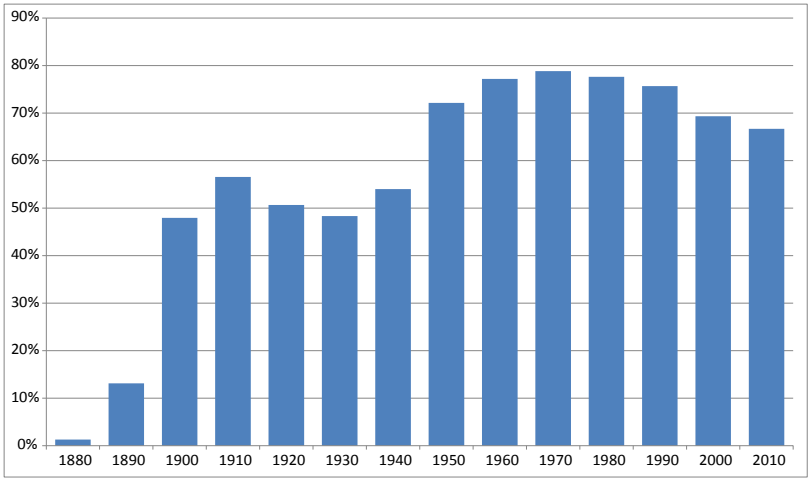

Figure 3: *Percentage in Alaska identified as white, 1880 to 2010 (U.S. Census)*

million, or 2 cents an acre, was signed on March 30, 1867. The transfer of power ceremony took place in October of that year on Castle Hill in Sitka.

EARLY AMERICAN ALASKA

The early American years of Alaska, corresponding roughly to the 30-year period between the Alaska purchase of 1867 and the start of the gold rush in 1897, were an era when Alaska grew little and had a small government footprint. The military ruled Alaska directly in the early years, but was tasked more with keeping order than with setting up a government.

Many of the early Americans who came to Alaska were missionaries, explorers, soldiers, or prospectors. As more outsiders came in, conflict with Alaska Natives increased — particularly in Southeast Alaska.

After several skirmishes including the shelling of Angoon by the U.S. Navy in 1882, the federal government finally established more control with the First Organic Act of 1884. This set up a bare bones civilian government with laws brought from Oregon, the nearest state at the time. Still, the new District of Alaska had few officials and administrators for a territory so large.

The population influx of Americans was slow following the Alaska Purchase. Alaska Natives were not fully counted as U.S. citizens until 1924, so the number of Americans in the colony was low until the early 1880s. In the early years, the population did not look that different from Russian America, with a few hundred whites living in an overwhelmingly Alaska Native land.

Many of the outsiders first into Alaska were soldiers. In the late 1860s, the U.S. Army set up several forts at various sites such as Port Tongass, Wrangell, Kodiak, Kenai, and Sitka. All except Sitka were soon abandoned, and by 1870 there were fewer than 100 soldiers in Alaska.

The first census of Alaska was not conducted until 1880. Ivan Petroff, a special agent of the census, traveled throughout Alaska conducting the count. (He also supervised the 1890 count.) The results looked similar to Father Veniaminov's estimates in 1839. Out of 33,426 people, only 430 were white settlers. (See Figure 3.) Of the 430 whites, 293 of them — or 68 percent — lived in Southeast Alaska, with 157 in the capital of Sitka and 105 in the old fortress town of Wrangell.

The vast majority in the count were Alaska Natives. The various groups classified as "Eskimos," living primarily in Northern and Western Alaska, made up 53 percent of the state population. Various other Native groups including Tlingit and Athabascans were 40 percent of the total population. An additional 1,756 people were classified as "Creole," which in this case meant descendents of Russians born in Alaska.

The 1880s marked the first large scale movement of non-Natives into Alaska, with new mining discoveries. Though dwarfed in numbers in the later gold rush years, the new settlers built towns and started to change the settlement patterns in the territory. In late 1880, local Tlingit Chief Kowee led prospectors Richard Harris and Joe Juneau to a creek on the Gastineau Channel that contained gold nuggets. The town site staked out near the claim was eventually named Juneau.

By the 1890 U.S. Census, Juneau was the largest city in Alaska, with 1,253 people. Across the channel, an additional 402 people lived at the new town site of Douglas near the new Treadwell mine and settlement. Both towns depended on mining, and many people moved in to take jobs in the

The 1880s marked the first large-scale movement of non-Natives into Alaska.

mine or supplemental industries. In the 1890 Census, Petroff wrote, "At the present day, the towns of Juneau and Douglas supply the only examples in Alaska of American Frontier settlements affording the ordinary necessities and conveniences of civilized life." By 1906, the capital of Alaska would be moved to Juneau.

The growth of the fishing and canning industry took off in the 1880s as well. The 1890 Census reported that of the 4,298 white inhabitants in Alaska, 2,277 were temporary outsiders mostly employed in the cannery industry.

In most areas of Alaska, with the exception of Southeast, the white inhabitants in the 1890 Census were cannery workers. In Kodiak, 928 of the 1,105 whites were cannery workers, as well as 310 of 318 in the Nushagak area. In the arctic region, 381 of the 391 whites worked on whaling ships.

The seafood industry also brought in a large number of Asian immigrants — 2,288 in 1890. This population of men (no Asian women were counted) worked mostly in the cannery business. There were 542 Asian workers in Karluk on Kodiak Island at that time.

GOLD RUSH ERA

The first large-scale growth in Alaska since the U.S. takeover was a direct result of the 1896 gold strike in the Klondike region of the Yukon Territory. Thousands of would-be prospectors set out along the most direct route to the Klondike through the towns of Skagway and Dyea through the Chilkoot Pass. Other prospectors fanned out across Alaska trying to find their own mining claims.

Gold was found at Anvil Creek on the Seward Peninsula in 1899, causing a rush of people to the new town site of Nome. The rush transformed the view of Alaska in the national consciousness into a place of tremendous and largely untapped natural resources. New settlers moved into regions of the territory where few non-Natives had lived before, and this led to the U.S. government's increasing interest in establishing political control. (Naske) Much of the population growth and settlement turned out to be temporary as boom towns came and went, and much of the money earned went south.

The 1900 Census captured a portrait of Alaska during this hectic period. The total population had nearly doubled from 1890 to 63,592 people now in the territory. The male-to-female ratio also increased, from 150 males per 100 females in 1890 to 258 males per 100 females in 1900. (See Figure 4.)

The settlement patterns of Alaska changed drastically with all of the newcomers. Nome, a gold mining boom town on the Seward Peninsula, was Alaska's largest city at 12,488 people and nearly 20 percent of the territory's population. No settlement in Alaska had been known to be this large before, and no incorporated city would reach 20 percent of the total population again until Anchorage in the 1960 census.

The second-largest city in Alaska was Skagway, with 3,117 people. Juneau and Sitka were the only other settlements with more than 1,000 inhabitants at that time, with 1,864 and 1,396 respectively.

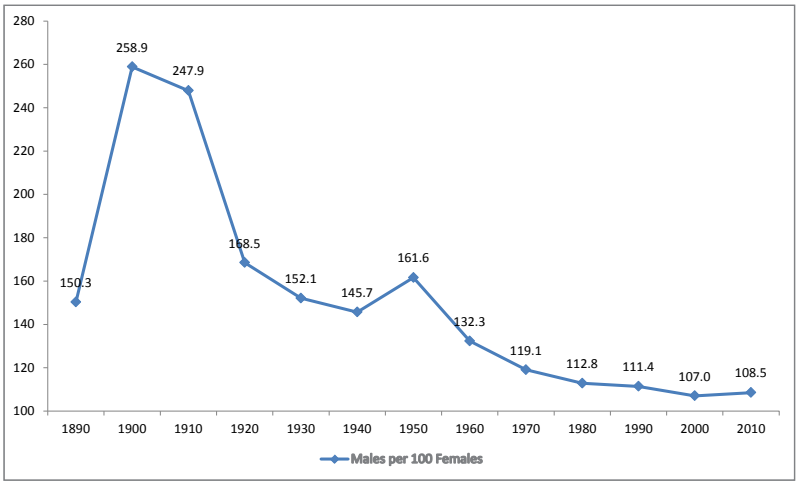

Figure 4: *Number of males per 100 females in Alaska, 1890 to 2010 (U.S. Census)*

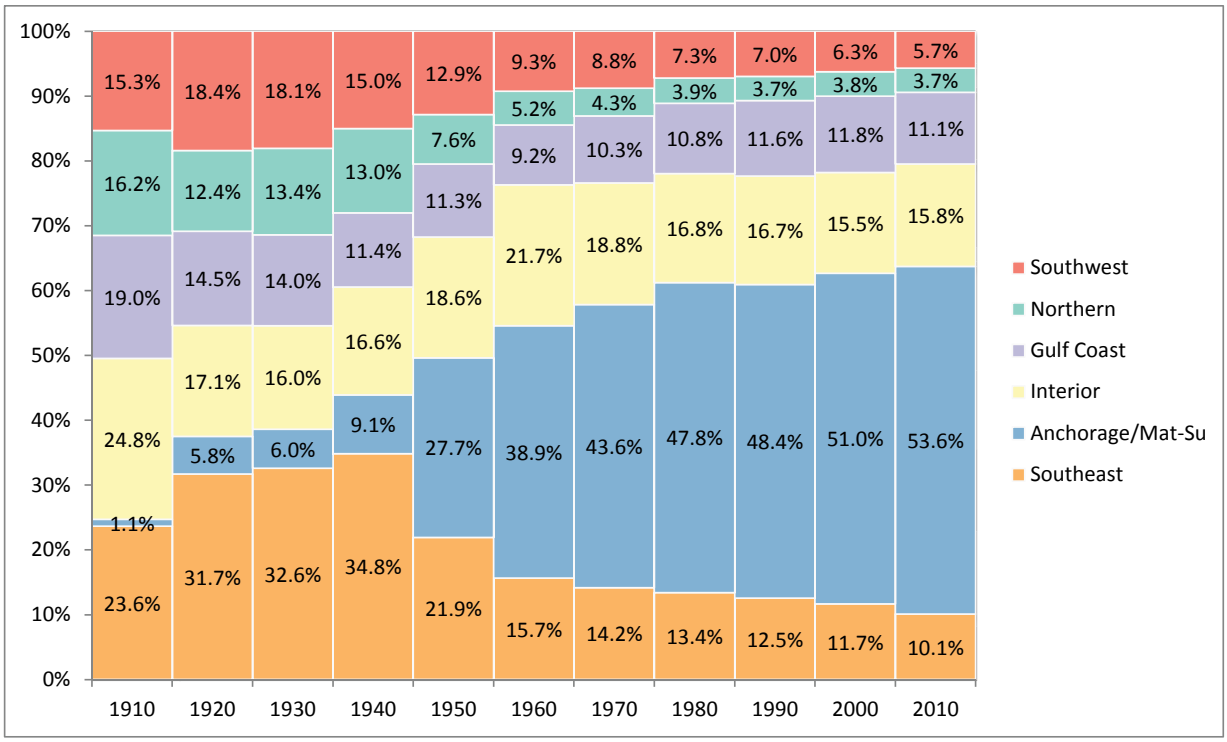

Figure 5: *Proportion of Alaska population by economic region, 1910 to 2010 (U.S. Census)*

The Gold Rush era also transformed the racial makeup of Alaska. In 1900, the indigenous Alaska Natives were a minority for the first time, at 46 percent of the total population. Whites came in large numbers. The 1900 census counted 30,493 whites (90 percent of whom were male) in the territory, up from 4,298 ten years earlier. Foreign-born whites made up about 29 percent of this total, with nearly half of them from Sweden, Norway, and Canada. However, the largest foreign-born population in 1900 was the Chinese, with about 3,100 people. Over the next few decades, the Chinese population in Alaska shrank considerably while the Swedish and Norwegian population continued to grow.

By the 1910 Census, Alaska settlement had shifted as the rush for gold tapered off. The territory as a whole gained just 764 people from 1900 to 1910. Nome, which by some estimates reached 20,000 in the years just after 1900, had fallen in population to 2,600. Skagway had also lost population, from 3,117 down to 858.

New mining areas developed in other parts of the territory, though. Fairbanks, founded in 1901 and soon to see its own gold boom, was Alaska's largest town by 1910 with 3,541 people and an additional 4,134 in surrounding settlements. Many other previously remote parts of Interior Alaska saw newcomers as different groups staked gold claims.

Other large scale mining projects run by outside companies attracted many new workers. On Douglas Island, the company towns of Douglas and Treadwell saw large increases in population during the decade. Douglas grew from 825 people in 1900 to 1,722 people in 1910 — larger than its neighbor Juneau (1,644) — and Treadwell grew from 522 people to 1,222 in the same period.

INTERWAR PERIOD

Alaska's population stagnated between the two World Wars. The gold boom had largely petered out, leaving most prospectors looking for opportunities elsewhere. Mining now often fell into the hands of large businesses that only needed a set number of employees. For example, the huge Kennecott Copper Mine was owned and operated from 1911 to 1939 by a small syndicate led by the Guggenheim family. It produced tremendous returns for in-

Fishing became the primary source of population change between the two world wars.

vestors — $207 million worth of ore — but did not radically realign Alaska's population and the area was deserted after closure. (Borneman) The economy of the territory had changed, and the population followed.

The 1920 Census recorded 55,036 people in Alaska, a 14.5 percent drop from 1910, which was due to several factors beyond the decline of mining. One was World War I — many of the men who were working in the territory left to join the army or war-related industries. Between 1910 and 1920, the number of males per 100 females in Alaska dropped from 247 to 168.

Another reason for the decline was the worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. The global disease spread to Alaska and hit Alaska Natives particularly hard. Several villages in Western Alaska, including Wales on the Bering Strait, were practically wiped out by the disease. All told, several thousand Alaska Natives likely died from influenza during that time.

Fishing became the primary source of population change between the world wars. In Southeast, record salmon harvests drove many to work on boats and in canneries. Salmon catches gradually rose through the interwar period, peaking in 1939 at levels not seen again until the 1980s. (Colt) Most of the salmon were caught by outside canning companies with huge salmon traps, drawing the ire of many local fishermen who later worked to outlaw the traps in the state constitution.

The expansion of commercial fishing led to a general realignment of population during the period. Southeast Alaska — with its ice free waters, fishing heritage, and proximity to Seattle fish markets — was the major beneficiary of this change. The region went from 23.6 percent of the territory's population in 1910 to 34.8 percent in 1940. (See Figure 5.) By 1920, Juneau had regained its position as the largest city in Alaska with Ketchikan, a cannery and fishing town, as the second-largest city. Juneau and

Figure 6: *Map of Alaska Railroad and "Rail Belt" communities during interwar period*

Ketchikan would remain one-two through the 1930 and 1940 censuses.

The Alaska Railroad, started a few years before American entry into World War I in 1917 and finished in 1923, did not have as much of an immediate effect on population settlement in the early days as often thought.

A railroad work camp at Ship Creek spawned the city of Anchorage in 1914. The future big-

gest city in Alaska was slow to develop in its early years, but was still one of Alaska's largest cities in 1920 at 1,856 people. By 1930, it had only grown to 2,277 and by 1940, with the start of military construction, the population was 3,495.

The region along the railroad route, commonly referred to as the Rail Belt (see Figure 6), grew modestly but lagged behind Southeast Alaska. Fairbanks' population fell to 1,155 in 1920 due to the mining industry decline and did not reach its 1910 population level again until World War II. Seward, with 534 people in 1910, grew slowly during the interwar period and had 949 people in 1940. Its fortunes would change with the war as well.

The interwar period also brought early settlement of the Matanuska-Susitna area. There had long been Athabascan settlements along the river valleys as well as in the village of Knik, located on the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet. But due to the region's remoteness, outside migration into Mat-Su did not really begin until the Alaska Railroad. Several stations on the railroad attracted settlers and eventually developed into towns, including Wasilla. Still, the region was a minor part of Alaska through the 1930 census.

The lower Mat-Su, roughly corresponding to the area south of Talkeetna, had 460 people in 1930. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, a New Deal program, selected 200 farm families from cold Midwest states to resettle in Mat-Su in 1935. The area around the settlements is now the town of Palmer, which by 1940 grew to more than 1,400 people. Though the massive growth of Mat-Su was still decades in the future, the foundation had been laid.

Alaska Natives during the interwar period increased as a proportion of Alaska's population. A sizable minority of 39 percent of the overall population in the 1910 Census, Alaska Native population numbers were almost even with whites through most of the interwar period. In the 1930 Census, Alaska was 50.6 percent Native, the last time to date when whites were not the majority in Alaska.

Though full citizenship came in 1924, political rights for Alaska Natives followed more slowly. When civil government finally came to Alaska in 1912 with the territorial legislature, Alaska Natives had more interaction with the American political process and formed organizations to demand more political rights. The fight for banning discrimination in public places, culminating in the Anti-Discrimination Act in 1945, foreshadowed the Alaska Native Land Claims fights as well as the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

WORLD WAR II AND THE COLD WAR MILITARIZATION

No other single event in Alaska's history has had as big an effect on settlement patterns as World War II. For the first time since the Alaska Purchase, the U.S. government saw Alaska's strategic military value and invested heavily in building up its infrastructure. (Hummel) The U.S. built new airfields and bases, roads, and docks, and improved communication.

A flood of newcomers in uniform arrived, and many would decide to make Alaska their home once they left the military. Shortly after the surrender of Japan and the end of World War II, even more military investment in Alaska followed as tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union led to the Cold War. Until it was later supplanted by the oil economy, military spending would be the dominant economic force in Alaska and forever change the population.

Before the war, Alaska was mostly ignored in military planning. (Hummel) Forts had been built and abandoned in many different places since 1867. The Army typically kept order in rowdy mining regions, but when the prospectors moved on, so did the soldiers. By the late 1930s, the only base in Alaska was the Chilkoot Barracks (Fort Seward) in Haines. This gold rush-era base had only 300 soldiers and no way to move them except for an old tugboat, leaving the entire territory practically defenseless. (Naske)

At the same time, the Empire of Japan began making aggressive movements in the Pacific. A Five-Power Naval Treaty signed in 1922 by the victors of World War I specified no new naval bases would be allowed in the Pacific. Though

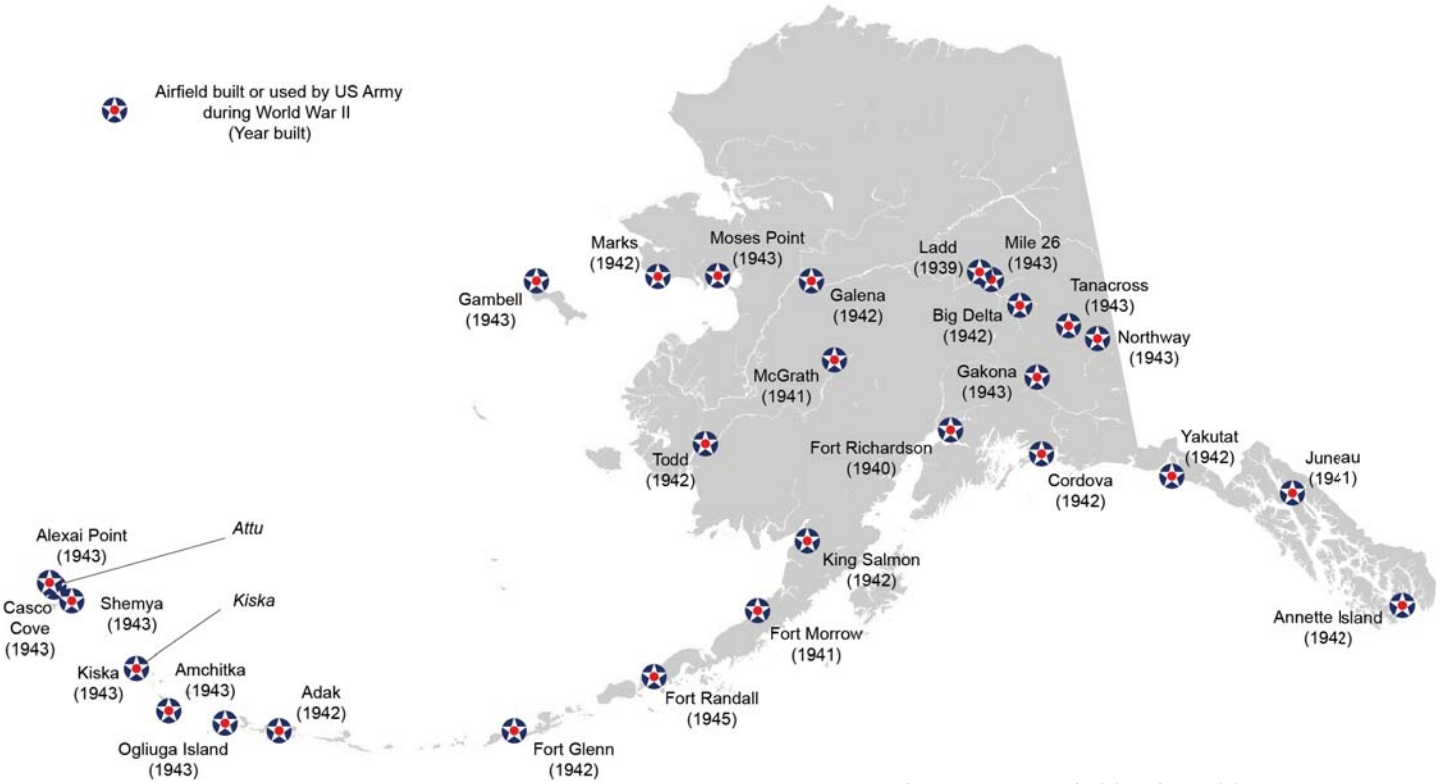

Figure 7: *Map of U.S. Army Airfields of World War II*

the U.S. abided by the treaty and had not built any bases in the Aleutians, Japan pulled out of the treaty in 1934. Following Japanese invasion of China coupled with the beginning of the war in Europe, the U.S. military finally began to build in Alaska. (See Figure 7.)

In 1939 and 1940, the Army built new bases in Anchorage (Fort Richardson) and Fairbanks (Ladd Field). These new bases, along the Alaska Railroad, led to an improvement in port facilities in Seward as well as upgrades to the railroad. A plan also was put in place to blast a tunnel to Passage Canal (Whittier) to provide a railroad route that avoided the steep grades on the Kenai Peninsula. The military built several new supply airfields in places such as Annette Island and Yakutat, which were used in 1941 to supply military equipment to Russia. By the time of the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, 20,000 soldiers were in Alaska.

After the U.S. entered the war, things moved quickly. Military building over the next three years would have a lasting effect on Alaska settlement. The Alaska Highway, built in 1942 from Alberta, Canada, to Fairbanks, at last connected Alaska with the lower 48 states and construction quickly followed of the Glenn Highway, which linked Anchorage to the national road system.

Before the war in the 1940 Census, Southeast was the most populous part of the territory. By the end of the war, Anchorage was Alaska's largest city — a title it has not given up since.

These developments, along with the new bases, secured the primacy of Anchorage and Fairbanks. Before the war in the 1940 Census, Southeast was the most populous part of the territory, with Juneau and Ketchikan its two largest cities; by the end of the war, Anchorage was Alaska's largest city — a title it has not given up since.

The war also brought many servicemen to Alaska. In 1942, the Japanese invaded and occupied the far western Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska — the first time since the War of 1812 that American territory had been taken by

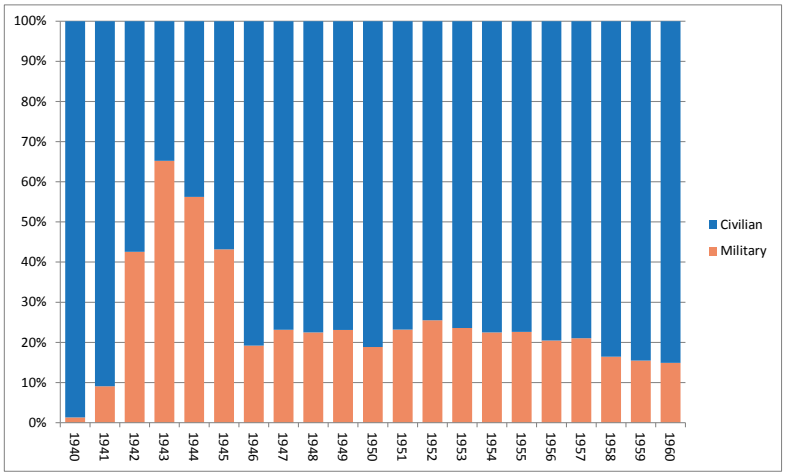

Figure 8: *Military and civilian proportions of Alaska population, 1940 to 1960 (Rogers)*

force. Japanese bombing attacks on Unalaska caused further concern that the Japanese would invade the North American mainland via Alaska. Though capture of the islands turned out to be a diversion from the main Japanese attack at Midway, American soldiers streamed into Alaska to help recapture them. (Conn)

In 1943, the year U.S. forces recaptured Attu and Kiska, soldiers in Alaska numbered 152,000, more than double the territory's total population of 72,524 in the 1940 Census. Without infrastructure to house this many troops, military construction boomed, and between 1941 and 1945, the government spent well over $1 billion in Alaska, or nearly $13 billion in 2012 dollars. (Hummel) This influx of federal money and soldiers helped make Anchorage the economic capital of the territory.

Following the surrender of Japan in the late summer of 1945, it appeared Alaska could fall into population and economic decline similar to the end of the gold rush era. (Hummel) Many of the prewar industries such as fishing or mining had been suspended or greatly reduced due to the loss of manpower or government wartime shutdowns. The military also looked as if it would scale back Alaska operations as part of the general postwar demobilization. The number of soldiers in the territory fell from 60,000 in 1945 to 19,000 the following year.

But as the Cold War emerged, Alaska's strategic position would prove invaluable to military planners. (Hummel) Alaska sat just across the narrow Bering Strait from the USSR and was positioned where plane routes to East Asia or to Europe over the polar regions were navigable.

During the war, the military had built bases all through the Aleutians for supplying the fight against Japan. In the Cold War, base construction and deployment of soldiers were overwhelmingly in the Anchorage and Fairbanks areas. In 1947, construction began on Eielson Air Force Base, the largest airfield in the world at the time. (Hummel) In Anchorage, the wartime Fort Richardson became Elmendorf Air Force Base and a new Fort Richardson was built just east of it. The concentration of forces in these two cities led to their predominance in Alaska population and the increased urbanization of the territory.

The early Cold War years had a large effect on Alaska's population and economy. Between 1940 and 1970, the military was the biggest employer and biggest spender in the state. (Hummel) In the early 1950s, with the start of the Korean War, a huge influx of soldiers entered Anchorage and Fairbanks and brought their families with them, unlike World War II. The territory's housing infrastructure was greatly undeveloped and strained to house all the new migrants. Large government housing finance programs spurred building in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Leading up to statehood in 1959, defense-related construction was the largest source of personal income for Alaskans. (Hummel) Between 1949 and 1953, the government spent an average of $250 million per year.

All of the defense-related economic growth profoundly changed Alaska settlement. The Anchorage and Fairbanks areas, about 15 percent of the population in 1940, increased to 40 percent by 1950. By 1960, those two cities and their surrounding areas would have more than half of Alaska's population, with much of the growth during the Korean War. The Anchorage area grew 52 percent between April 1950 and December of 1951.

In 1951 and 1952, net migration to Alaska was higher than 20,000 people per year and its de-

mographics began to shift. In 1952, the enlisted portion of Alaska's population hit a postwar high of 26 percent. The proportion of Alaska that was white also greatly increased between 1940 and 1960. In 1940, whites were just 54 percent of the population, with Alaska Natives close behind at 44 percent. By 1960, shortly after Alaska became a state in 1959, nearly 4 in 5 Alaskans identified themselves as white.

NORTH SLOPE CRUDE AND OIL BOOM AND BUST

In 1968, geologists with the Atlantic Richfield Company, or ARCO, struck oil in Prudhoe Bay. Though there had been oil discoveries earlier in Alaska's history, such as on the Kenai Peninsula in the late 1950s, no discovery had been this big. The fact that the largest oil field in North America was discovered on state-owned land meant a financial windfall. The lease sale on September 10, 1969 yielded $900 million, about nine times higher than the entire state budget the previous year.

However, construction of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline did not start until 1974, as it was delayed by the settlement of Alaska Native land claims and debate over the environmental impact. Workers poured into the state intent on getting in on the high-paying jobs and wealth available, and Alaska's net migration hit 30,222 in 1975 followed by 19,576 net migrants in 1976. The state population had grown 18 percent in just two years, from 348,100 in 1974 to 409,800 in 1976.

The effects of the incoming population were not spread evenly throughout the state. Some areas experienced little if any pressure from incoming residents, while others were stretched thin. Along the pipeline route, a "Skinny City" of pipeline camps popped up to house the workers. (See Figure 9.) While most are nothing more than gravel today, during the three years of pipeline construction 60,000 workers moved through the camps, with many being among Alaska's largest settlements.

Among established cities, Anchorage was best able to weather the storm of newcomers due to its already-large population. Still, many newcomers caused shortages in available housing and jobs. Fairbanks, the jumping-off point and recreational retreat of many pipeline workers, was bursting at the seams. Traffic increased in the city, new residents put a strain on city services and utilities, and prices of goods shot up with all the money pipeline workers were making. (Cole) Valdez, the terminus of the pipeline on Prince William Sound, weathered even greater strain. Its population rose from 1,300 in

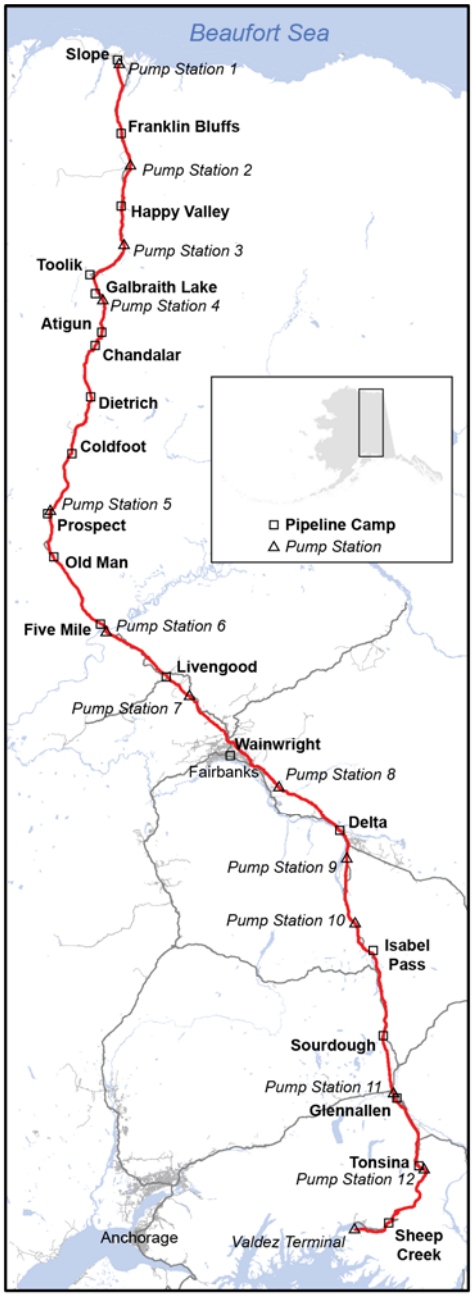

Figure 9: *Map of the Alaska Pipeline Route, with worker camps, 1974 to 1977 and pump stations*

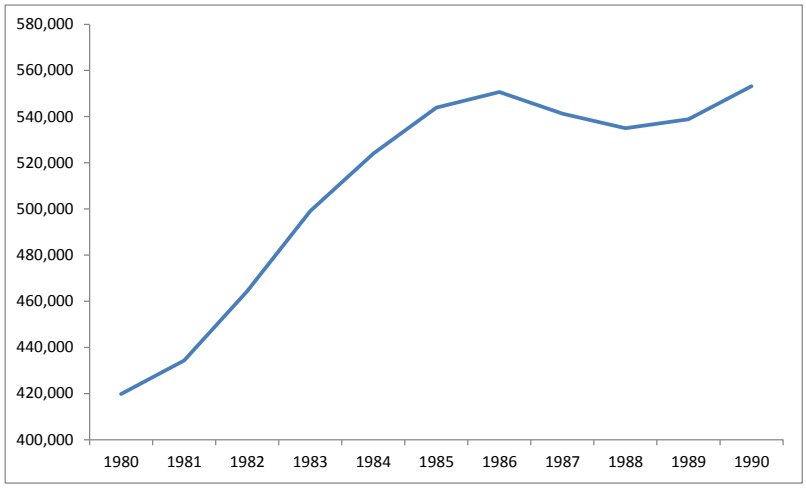

Figure 10: *Alaska population in the 1980s (U.S. Census)*

early 1974 to more than 8,000 in 1976. (Cole) Available housing was nonexistent, and city services were stretched thin.

The pipeline was complete by the summer of 1977, and many of the workers left the state for other jobs, although a considerable number remained. Alaska lost approximately 6,400 people by 1978 and grew by only 2,100 in 1979 as departing pipeline workers continued to cause a net loss. Between 1978 and 1979, growth was a modest 0.51 percent.

The tides again began to turn in 1979, when the energy crisis caused by the Iranian Revolution laid the seeds of massive growth in the early 1980s. Oil prices skyrocketed and Alaska's economy took off. Between 1979 and 1980, Alaska grew by 6,100 people, followed by a jump of 14,500 people between 1980 and 1981.

The 1980s brought a wild swing in Alaska's economy that reflected in the population totals. (See Figure 10.) In the early part of the decade, two converging factors drove population growth. The first was the high price of oil. In the new Alaska oil economy, this filled the state's coffers and set off an economic boom. Between 1980 and 1985, net migration averaged around 15,000.

The second factor was an "echo boom" of new babies born in the state — many of the baby boomers who had settled in Alaska during the 1970s began having children. The birth rate went up from 1.94 in 1976 to 2.43 in 1983, and the state's population rose from 401,851 at the 1980 Census to around 550,000 by mid-decade. Alaska was no longer the least populous state in the union, passing Wyoming early in the decade.

Then the bottom fell out. The price of oil collapsed worldwide between 1985 and 1986, which drove Alaska into a deep recession. People fled the state in droves. Between 1986 and 1987, the state population declined statewide and in larger cities, with the net migration loss of 19,245 that translated into an overall population decline of 9,400 when mitigated by natural increase (births minus deaths). A net migration loss of 15,710 followed in 1988, for an overall population decline of 6,300.

Though people were still leaving by 1989, the rate of loss was low enough that Alaska's high birth rate reversed the decline. With net migration back in the positive by 1990, that year's census placed Alaska's population at 550,043, about the same level as 1986.

At the local level, the pipeline years and the wild swings that followed did not cause as big a change in Alaska's population distribution as the 1940s and 1950s. The dominance of Anchorage remained through the era as oil companies made their local headquarters there and much of the economic boom centered there. New buildings dotted the Anchorage skyline, and parts of the Anchorage Bowl that were previously undeveloped began to fill in with new subdivisions. The region went from 43.6 percent of the state's population in 1970 to 48.4 percent of the population in 1990. In the 1990s, Anchorage and Mat-Su would cross the 50 percent line.

ALASKA SINCE 1990

By the start of the 1990s, factors that had previously driven large changes in Alaska population and settlement began to recede. Over the long term, the Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the USSR. Strategic military planning shifted away from Alaska, leading to base closures and to a decline in military personnel and spending in the state

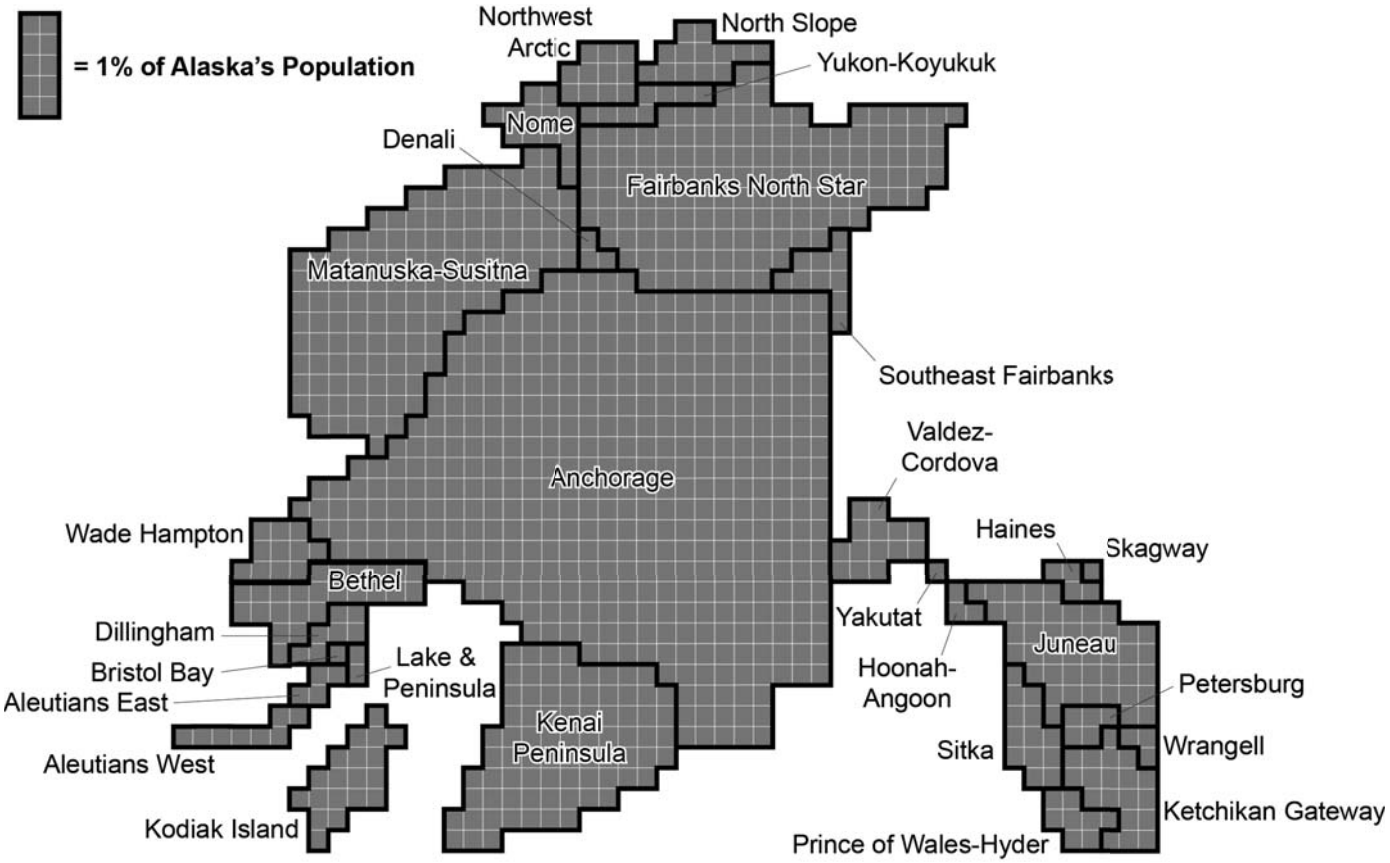

Figure 11: *Alaska population by borough as a proportion of the state, 2010 (U.S. Census)*

throughout the '90s. But with the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the war in Afghanistan, military reinvested in Alaska. Still, the military is less of a factor in population dynamics for the time being.

Another large factor, oil, began to stabilize around 1990. The wild oil boom and bust of the 1980s hit Alaska hard, and since that time the state has found itself on more firm footing. Alaska's population grew steadily through the 1990s and 2000s, surpassing Vermont and North Dakota to become the 47th state for population size. Settlement patterns have changed along the margins, but the huge sudden shifts of earlier eras have been absent.

Since the oil bust ended in the early 1990s, the state's population growth has been stable and steady at an average of 1.46 percent each year. The population expanded from 550,043 in 1990 to 626,932 in 2000 and then to 710,231 in 2010. Anchorage/Mat-Su was home to 54 percent of the state's residents in 2010.

Alaska has also become more racially diverse since 1990. According to the U.S. Census, the percentage of white residents dropped during this time period, from 76 percent in 1990 to 67 percent in 2010. However, much of the nonwhite population growth was not driven by Alaska Natives. Between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of the state made up of non-Native minorities grew from about 7 percent to around 11 percent, mainly fueled by the increase of Asians in Anchorage. Anchorage went from having around 9,500 people (4.2 percent) of Asian descent in 1990 to more than 23,000 Asians (8.1 percent) in 2010.

One major development since 1990 is the growth of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Known since the 1930s for farming, Mat-Su has grown in population at rates far exceeding the rest of the state. The borough was home to just 6,509 people in 1970 before the pipeline

Since the oil bust ended in the early 1990s, the state's population growth has been stable and steady at an average of 1.46 percent each year.

boom. By 1990, its population was 39,683. In the 20 years between, the oil boom and economic growth spurred massive development of the land, and increased traffic led to widening and improvement of the Glenn Highway. This allowed people to live in Mat-Su bedroom communities and commute to Anchorage for work.

Since 1990, Mat-Su's population has continued to grow an average of 6.2 percent a year, and in 2010, its population stood at 88,995. During that period, Mat-Su went from 7 percent of the state's population to 13 percent. (See Figure 11.)

An important population change in Alaska since 1990 is the migration of rural residents, particularly Alaska Natives, to the urban centers of the state. Though it's often perceived as a one-way emptying of rural Alaska, the truth is more complicated.

It's true that the Alaska Native majority areas of the state have continual net migration losses. Between 2000 and 2010, 2,364 people moved from Native majority areas each year and 1,513 came in, for a net migration loss of 851 people per year. For those moving within Alaska, most go to Anchorage though large numbers resettle in Fairbanks and Mat-Su as well.

Though this net migration loss has an effect, Native majority areas have a higher-than-average birth rate that has allowed them to generally keep pace with statewide growth. As a percentage of the state's population, Natives only fell from 10 percent to 9 percent between 1990 and 2000.

The percentage of Alaska Natives who live in the five most urban boroughs — Anchorage, Fairbanks, Mat-Su, Kenai, and Juneau — jumped from 42 percent in 2000 to 49 percent in 2010. The effects this urbanization will have on the Alaska Native community remain to be seen.

Alaska's military population had a period of decline between 1990 and 2010 following the end of the Cold War and increased again after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, or "9/11," and the subsequent start of the U.S. government's "War on Terror." In 1990, the twilight of the Cold War, Alaska had about 23,000 active duty military members, or about 4 percent of the state. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Alaska sustained a series of base closures that reduced its military numbers.

The largest closure was Adak Naval Base in the Aleutians, which had more than 2,500 service members in 1990 and was shut down by mid-decade. Other general shifts lowered the numbers of service members on other bases as well, and by 2000 the statewide military total was down to about 17,500.

After 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan, Alaska's strategic value again came into play, and state army bases have seen large increases since 2000. The Army makes up about 55 percent of the state's military today, up from around 40 percent in 1990. By 2010, the military population had rebounded to its 1990 level of around 23,000.

A HISTORY OF CHANGE

Alaska's population settlement patterns reveal its history. The Alaska Native villages that dot the coastline and rivers hearken back millennia. Many Pacific Ocean ports still center on a Russian Orthodox church, and many old mining buildings still stand though the prospectors are long gone. If you drive on a highway that connects the large urban areas of Alaska or fly into a small town airport, chances are they were built during World War II. The pipeline camps are long gone, but the oil economy they built still shapes the state population settlement.

Alaska's population history is filled with sudden changes that reshaped it, and future events have the potential to change the picture yet again. One lesson from Alaska's population history is that nothing lasts forever, and Alaska's destiny is not set in stone.

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